

# While Bodies Get Mirrored

## An Exhibition about Movement, Formalism and Space

6<sup>th</sup> March – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010

**Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová – Martin Soto Climent – Maya Deren –  
William Forsythe – Julian Goethe – Delia Gonzalez – Babette Mangolte – Anna Molska –  
Kelly Nipper – Paulina Olowaska – Silke Otto-Knapp – Mai-Thu Perret – Hanna Schwarz**

This group exhibition brings together works that thematise the relation of tension between movement and space, and in so doing take up and reactivate a formalist vocabulary of signs. One focus of the exhibition is the influence of (post) modern dance and choreography in contemporary art. Another central theme is the re-presentation of the performative, and the notation of movement and dancerly activities through the most varied media, ranging from classical photography and the filmic through to the sculptural and installative.

Early post modern dance and its postulation that “every movement is part of a dance and every person is a dancer” can be read on the one hand as an historical bridging moment to modernism, but also, on the other, as a moment that links the exhibited positions in this exhibition. In post modern dance, the legacy of formalist expression of movement has been applied and further developed, in a reaction to contemporary visual arts. In the last few years there has been an increased interest by younger artists in resuming and rediscovering this avant-garde movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – the formal-aesthetic as well as the social perspective. The formal-aesthetic perspective entails moments of mirroring, reflecting, coruscating, and the dissection of complex forms surveyed in their simple geometric elements, and becomes an important expressive tool in a formal language.

**Martin Soto Climent** (born, 1977, Mexico) often uses objects and things he has found on the street or bought in second-hand shops for his sculptural installations. He arranges these objects, sometimes unchanged, sometimes having undergone minimalist interventions, into new constellations as sculptures or as installations in the exhibition space. In so doing he connects with the tradition of surrealist objects, which often only unfurl their suggestive power by the inclusion of a work title. For the work given the poetic title *The Swan Swoons in the Still of the Swirl* (2010), Soto Climent uses Venetian blinds, putting the object's functional and structural properties to the test in a dancerly procedure. By means of simple gestures the functional object is turned into an organic form, and fixed. For the work *Impulsive Chorus (Feldschlösschen)* (2010), which took place as a performance during the opening, Soto Climent took the guests' empty beer cans and arranged them in a circular sculpture. This can be seen to connect to the tradition of “social sculpture” where a work emerges with the help of a collective. The approximately 300 beer cans the artist used can also stand as surrogates for the individuals who drank the beer, and provide a metaphor for the evening experienced in common.

In her works, **Paulina Olowaska** (born 1976, Poland) occupies herself with utopian ideas and avant-garde movements of modernity, whereby her particular attention is directed towards unknown characters and protagonists. Olowaska attempts to usher potential historical positions into consciousness, to pose critical questions, and activate them in a contemporary discourse. In *Pioneer Alphabet Letters* (2005) and *Alphabet* (2010), Olowaska uses an alphabet in which letters are presented with the body. This alphabet was developed by a typographer and a dancer from a Czech artist collective in the 1920s. They wanted to attain “poetry for all the senses,” and brought poems into a form of enactment. This idea of an all encompassing collective creativity was taken up by Olowaska in 2005 on the roof of the Berlin Meerrettich Gallery, where she presented poems by friends, with friends.

Alongside her work as camerawoman for film makers and artists such as Michael Snow and Chantal Akerman, **Babette Mangolte** (France) started her own filmic work at the beginning of the 1970s, documenting performances of the New York avant-garde in film and photography. In so doing she devoted herself to dance and art performances, as well as theatre performances. A large part of the

visual material that made 1970s and 1980s artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson known to us, is the work of Mangolte. In her installation *Touching* (2008), Mangolte makes part of her comprehensive archive accessible in a literal sense: photographs of her collaborative works from the 1970s are spread out over a table and may be ordered into a new typology. Mangolte's interest is in testing different image types and display forms with the visitor—she also uses the single iconic image and the slide show. The film of the installation *Collage 2* (2007) is a montage of street scenes from New York in the 1970s, and sequences from her films *What Maisie Knew* (1975) and *The Camera: Je Or La Camera: I* (1978).

**Maya Deren** (1917–1961, Ukraine/USA) is regarded as a pioneer of American avant-garde film. Initially Deren was active as a dancer and choreographer for Katherine Dunham, to whom she also penned theoretical writings. Dance enables the presentation of “inner realities ... which the human lives,” as Deren said herself. In *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) Deren deploys several film-dramaturgical techniques, such as editing, and also slow motion. This approach leads to a synthesis of dance and film. Aside from that, Deren herself often moves, camera in hand, to the movements of dancer Talley Beatty, enabling the camera itself to become a “dancing body”. After almost 50 seconds of the approximately 3 minute film, the director—by dint of simple but extremely precise editing—has Beatty carry out a “transcendental” leap: his leg movement begins in one pictorial space—a wooded landscape—and leaps out into another space—the interior of an apartment—where the leap is completed. This iconic moment is repeated in the film by Deren in several variations, and in so doing she ushers in a new era in the fusion between dance and film.

Together with her long-term collaborator Gavin Russom, artist and musician **Delia Gonzalez** (born 1972, USA) pursues artistic and musical projects incorporating minimalist aesthetic sculptures and electronic music into hybrid installations. Gonzalez' new work *In Remembrance...* (2010), in which she works with 16mm film, is based on a passage of text by Henry Miller, which his intimate friend Anaïs Nin quoted in her journals. It contains a description of the black wings of Oberon, the elfin king, as he surfaced in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), and the description of a moment of illumination that is at the same time described as the experience of a second childhood. Gonzalez takes up this quotation and translates it into neo-classical ballet choreography. In the first part of the film the choreography is determined by a moment of reflection, in which a ballerina dances in front of a classical mirror wall in a room darkened by special effects. The tonality of the film is created by red tones and deep black. In the second part, similar patterns of movement are repeated, this time with another ballerina. The moment of reflection and the doubling can also be read as an abstract symbol for Oberon's black wings.

Since 2000, **Anetta Mona Chișa and Lucia Tkáčová** (born 1975, Rumania and 1977, Slovakia respectively) have collaborated in their work. In the film *Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Let's Conclude)* (2008) they show a group of majorettes marching over a modernist concrete bridge. Their short uniforms refer to a conservative-sexist image of women. What looks at first sight like a traditional march is in fact the translation of the final part of *Manifesto della donna futurista* (1912) by French artist Valentine de Saint Point (1875–1953) into semaphore, an old-fashioned shipping signal language. She wrote her manifesto in reaction to Marinetti's *Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909), which was very contemptuous of women. Although Saint-Point may be seen as taking a proto-feminist position, in that she advocates the dissolution of binary gender structures, in the end she falls again for a biological-sexist argument, and calls on women to give birth to new war heroes. And so it seems that the self-conscious majorette army is in the end only another male fantasy.

**Julian Goethe's** (born 1966, Germany) sculptures can be characterized by their dramatic and theatrical gesture. They are unruly, and occasionally appear like brutal objects with something monstrous inherent in them. The sculpture *Kontakt* (2005) is composed of a black, painted wood construction, stretching into the space, also providing a display space for the video *Walls Talk* (2005), which was created in cooperation with the artist Antje Stöffler. Goethe described the hybrid formation of the film as “moving decoration.” The 80-minute black-and-white sequence of images portrays masculine bodybuilders, visionary film architecture from 1930s and 1940s Hollywood, classical engravings, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi's prison drawings. Through slow movement of the camera, which zooms continually in until the images are virtually unrecognizable, they are all scanned and investigated. On a second image level they are covered with a fine net of lines, recalling Spirograph drawings. Hence a relationship of tension between the two levels of images is created: a concrete, hard image world meets an organic network of lines, which seemingly comprises a measurement of the same. They are supported by an ambient musical soundtrack, which expands into the space, gently wrapping itself around the observer.

Since 1999, *The Crystal Frontier*, a continuous narrative of the fictive women's commune New Ponderosa Year Zero in the desert of New Mexico, has provided a background for **Mai-Thu Perret's** (born 1976, Switzerland) oeuvre. Diary entries about life on the farm, dolls made of papier-mâché, but also abstract paintings on plywood and artisanal objects such as textiles and pottery with which the commune ekes out a living, are all part of her versatile work. This narrative contains a number of references to various themes, such as utopian feminist literature, art theory, design history and soviet propaganda, to name but a few. The work *Winter of Discontent or the Ballad of a Russian Doll* (2003) is a sculpture that is simultaneously created as the stage of a musical revue of the same name, which narrates in fragments the experiences of the women's commune.

**Silke Otto-Knapp** (born, 1970 Germany) frequently takes photographic documentation material from avant-garde dance productions as the starting point for her painting. Otto-Knapp's interest here is not in methods of appropriation, but instead in a renewed transformation of the surface and the moment of the figure's movement, which is played out anew in these almost monochrome image spaces. As a result, they serve as formal and conceptual models. The metallic colors make the figures shimmer on the screen, suggesting movement. Moreover, in this way Otto-Knapp distances herself from parameters of authenticity and gestural expressiveness inherent to the medium of painting. One body of work is based on photographs from Bronislava Nijinska's 1923 choreography for Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, which was much influenced by the handling of space and a reduced aesthetic of modernism. The ritualized poses of the female and male dancers, as well as their A-line costumes, turn them into an arrangement of geometric volumes and oscillating lines.

The setting of *Shifting Shapes* (2009–2010) by **Kelly Nipper** (born 1971, USA) is the skeleton of an oversized large-format camera, in which a dancer moves. The projection on the left embodies the bellows of the camera, through which a dancer crawls in a pleated dress. The stage situation on the right illustrates what takes place in front of the camera. In the middle projection the dancer attempts, via motion instructions from a voice in "off," to keep pace. She forms an icosahedron with her body, a three dimensional body made up of 20 equilateral triangles. Rudolf von Laban, the Hungarian dancer and motion analyst who understood improvised and individual choreographed dance as an expression of emotional experience, saw his motion teachings concretized in the icosahedron. The movements of the dancer on the one hand imitate a clock, which plays an important role in Nipper's work, and on the other recall the mechanical operations of a camera whose movements fix something as film or photography.

The dancer and choreographer **William Forsythe** (born 1949, USA) researches the dynamic structures of choreography, and translates them into new contexts. Forsythe's installations and film works, developed in parallel to his career in choreography, have been presented over the last two decades in numerous museums and exhibitions. The fragmentary perception, which he implements as a guiding principle in his dance productions, is recorded in the exhibition space by joined mirrors. The choreographic object *The Defenders Part 2* (2008) defends—as the title suggests—the observer from a "simple" mirroring. Forsythe therefore avoids the classical art historical significance of the mirror as a Vanitas motif. Initially through a heightened physical exertion of turning oneself in this sculptural manner, which can simultaneously be described as a choreographic moment, the observer retrieves a fragment of his image.

In her films and installations **Hanna Schwarz** (born 1975, Germany) quotes modernist and minimalist forms and motifs, and choreographic elements from postmodern dance, and examines them from today's perspective. In the 16mm film *Give* (2010), the hand and its various gestures, which stem from various quoted sources, plays the central role. Schwarz, taking her cue from Yvonne Rainer's film *Hand Movie* (1966), links to a choreography of hands, which places the everyday treatment of money and the exchange of goods carried out by our hands in the center. The approaches used in the film recall the style of film maker Robert Bresson (1901–1999) who is distinguished by the sobriety of an ostensible loss of attraction of the image. These two levels of quotation are interwoven with sequences about a dancer who takes on these poses and transforms them into classical ballet movements. Just as in her earlier dance works Yvonne Rainer brought everyday movements onto the stage, Schwarz makes choreographic moments out of everyday gestures.

In her video works, for example *Tanagram* (2006–2007), **Anna Molska** (born 1983, Poland) stages the political potential of bodies and their movements, referring in particular to the history of the former Eastern Bloc. Two muscular young men, wearing only helmets and leather braces, and a mansize version of the Chinese board game Tanagram are the protagonists of this work. The men's activities, which are at first glance incomprehensible, can be interpreted as a kind of constructivist theatre. The black cube that the protagonists form on the white floor recalls Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square*

(1915) filmed from above. The soundtrack, beginning with experimental singing, which runs over the Soviet marching song Poljuschko Polje, thus takes on a second exegetical level. The block formations are here the image of a Soviet military parade. After their activities the protagonists lie on the floor and exchange a few words in Russian. This short dialogue stems from an old Polish-Russian language book, in which Poland is referred to as the "little brother of Russia," highlighting the tense relationship between the two countries.

Curators of the exhibition: Raphael Gygax, Heike Munder

**PERFORMANCE BY MAI-THU PERRET:** Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> April at 7pm, Mai-Thu Perret will present the performance «The Ballad of a Russian Doll», a musical revue, in the museum with musicians Tamara Barnett-Herrin and Nigel of Bermondsey, For further information please visit: [www.migrosmuseum.ch](http://www.migrosmuseum.ch).

**PERFORMANCE BY KELLY NIPPER:** Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> April at 7pm, Kelly Nipper will present a performance in the museum with dancer Taisha Paggett, created in conjunction with the video installation she is displaying in the exhibition. For further information please visit: [www.migrosmuseum.ch](http://www.migrosmuseum.ch).

**SCREENING "DANCING BY MYSELF":** The screening on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm is dedicated to solo dance throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Amongst those featured are dance films by: Trisha Brown, Isadora Duncan, William Forsythe, Loïe Fuller, Miriam LaVelle, Erna Ómarsdóttir.

**CATALOGUE:** in connection with the exhibition, a detailed anthology entitled *Zwischenzonen* (Between Zones) will be issued in June 2010, discussing and furthering the current exhibition, as well as the exhibition *While Interwoven Echoes Drip into a Hybrid Body – An Exhibition about Sound, Performance and Sculpture* (2006). The central issues of this discussion are intersections/overlaps, and the folding or rolling into one another of the performative and various art categories such as sculpture, installation and film. With texts by Philip Auslander, Raphael Gygax, Kristina Köhler, Verena Kuni, Babette Mangolte, Heike Munder.

**PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS:** Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March, 4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April, 9<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May, at 3pm, as well as Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March and 27<sup>th</sup> May at 6.30pm.

**PUBLIC HOLIDAYS:** the museum will be closed on Good Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April, Easter Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> April and Whit Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> May.

**OPENING HOURS:** Tues / Wed / Fri Midday–6pm, Thurs Midday–8pm, Sat / Sun 11am–5pm. Entrance to the museum is free every Thursday from 5-8pm.

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